
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 21-02

Bazelon-McGovern House

3020 University Terrace NW

Meeting Date: February 25, 2021
Applicant: Gordon Kit (owner) and the D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 3D

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Bazelon-McGovern House, 3020 University Terrace NW, a historic landmark to be entered into the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. HPO further recommends that the Board forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion C with architecture as the area of significance and with 1957 as its period of significance.



Historical and Architectural Background

The Japanese-inspired mid-century Modern house at 3020 University Terrace NW was constructed in 1957 by David L. Bazelon, Chief Justice of the D.C. Court of Appeals, and his wife, Miriam. The Bazelons hired modernist architect Jean-Pierre Trouchaud, a French-born and Ecole des Beaux Arts-trained architect who emerged as a popular and highly acclaimed designer in his brief D.C. Trouchaud designed the house in consultation with his clients, but particularly with Miriam, who encouraged the Japanese aesthetic that is expressed in plan, in relationships between the house and landscape, and in architectural features and furnishings. The Bazelons resided here with their children for more than a decade before selling the property in 1969 to Democratic Senator George McGovern (D-South Dakota) and his wife. The McGoverns lived in the house with their five children until 1980 during an important period in McGovern's political career, including his 1972 campaign for president.

The Bazelon-McGovern house is a two-story wood frame house set well back from the street, built into the hillside at the end of a driveway. The hill slopes away behind it so that the front of the house appears to be a low-lying, single story building, while at the rear, its expansive lower level opens onto the south yard and a designed garden. The house is covered with a low gable roof supported by an exposed post-and-beam framing system. Porches or verandas on three sides and full-height windows and doors emphasize the modernist design principle of merging interior and exterior spaces.

The fenestration incorporates full-height *Fasuma* screens of a “twice repeated four panel treescape mechanically drawn on paper” that slide horizontally to cover the window openings from within. When the screens are closed, they become a detail of the façade. Japanese design influence is found throughout the property: its open house plan, architectural details like sliding *shoji* screens and *torii* arches, and a Japanese-inspired garden. Although significantly enhanced by the current owner, the garden retains several original plantings of two different species of Japanese cherry trees.

The house was constructed at a time when residential modernism was gaining appeal in a traditionally conservative city. The nomination provides historic context on modernism in general and within D.C. and points to the early expression and evolution of the aesthetic in the city during the 1930s and early 1940s. As interest in the style gained momentum for institutional buildings and apartment buildings during these decades, modernist detached homes were pretty much non-existent until the late 1940s, a good decade after modernism had appeared in the Washington suburbs. The nomination also provides context on the influence of Japanese design in the United States and in D.C.

By the early 1950s, individual homes and modernist enclaves were developing in certain neighborhoods in the District including Forest Hills and the Palisades, particularly along University Terrace and Chain Bridge Road.¹ These neighborhoods of large lots and challenging topography lent themselves to the modern aesthetic. In 1952, the Sidwell Friends School sponsored a house tour that featured ten modernist houses on Chain Bridge Road and University Terrace, five of which had been designed by Jean-Pierre Trousseau, including the architect’s own residence at 2970 Chain Bridge, now demolished. Between 1949 and 1961, more than a dozen private homes were commissioned in Forest Hills, including one designed by Trousseau at 2900 Fessenden Street NW. Still others can be found scattered around the District’s many neighborhoods, outliers amongst twentieth-century revival-style houses. Many modernist houses were designed by locally and nationally prominent architects, including Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Charles Goodman, Arthur Keys, I.M. Pei, Philip Johnson, Hugh Newell Jacobsen, Richard Neutra, David Yerkes, Grosvenor Chapman, Cross & Adreon, the Architects Collaborative, and notable African-American modernists Howard Mackey and Robert Madison, among others.

Evaluation

The nomination argues that the Bazelon-McGovern house meets D.C. Designation Criterion C (National Register Criterion B) for its association with both David Bazelon and George McGovern, significant persons in the history of the nation, and D.C. Designation Criteria D, E and F (National

¹ Brookland is also home to a number of early modern houses, mostly designed by African American architects associated with Howard University School of Architecture.

Register Criterion C) for architecture, as the house embodies the distinctive characteristics of mid-century modern residential design with a notable Japanese influence and is the work of notable modernist architect Jean-Pierre Trouchaud.

HPO concurs that the Bazelon-McGovern house embodies the distinctive characteristics of mid-century modern residential design. It illustrates the maturation of modernism in the traditionally conservative District and the acceptance of non-Western influence in the movement. Further, it is the work of architect Jean-Pierre Trouchaud, whose designs contributed significantly to the character of Chain Bridge Road and University Terrace as important enclaves of modern residential architecture in the city.

The application and additional documentation provide a biography of Jean Pierre Trouchaud, a Beaux Arts-trained French architect who was active in the field in France, earning recognition and awards for his designs before he moved to D.C. in the postwar years. Here, he struck out on his own, garnering attention in the local press in 1947 remodeling a Georgetown rowhouse. By the early 1950s, Trouchaud had found his niche designing custom houses in a modern aesthetic for private clients, mostly along University Terrace and Chain Bridge Road, where he also designed and built his own house. His commissions appear to have been secured by word-of-mouth, as it was with the Bazelons; he clearly benefited from personal associations, including that of his wife's brother who subdivided the tract where Trouchaud would build 2960 and 2964 University Terrace. Trouchaud became a leader in popularizing the modernist movement and helped create this collection of modern residences in the Palisades. Other modernist architects, including Chloethiel Woodward Smith, Robert McMillen of the Architects Collaborative, Vosbek-Ward architects and, later, Hugh Newell Jacobsen, designed homes along the two streets, establishing it as a notable modernist enclave.

Due in part to their modest sizes and gracious lots, mid-century modern houses in the Palisades and the District generally are under threat. Of the eight houses that Trouchaud designed in the Palisades, five have been demolished in recent years, including his own, replaced with larger and more numerous houses. Others have also been lost in the Palisades, Forest Hills and beyond. Cumulatively, these razes are compromising the character of University Terrace and Chain Bridge Road and are reducing the body of the District's quality modernist residences.

HPO is conducting a survey of mid-century modern houses. When completed, the survey will provide a better understanding of the evolution of modern design in the city. Based upon the information collected to-date, the Bazelon-McGovern House stands out architecturally and for its associations with one of the city's noted modernists. Designating the house a landmark will contribute important information to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, adding greater breadth of architectural style as others in the category are lost.

In evaluating the property under National Register Criterion B, HPO has closely reviewed the National Register Bulletin, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria*. To qualify under Criterion B, the bulletin notes that a property is eligible under Criterion B if it is associated with a significant person's productive life, reflecting the period of time when he or she achieved significance. It further notes that each property associated with a significant individual should be compared to other associated properties to identify those that best represent the person's historic

contributions in the field for which they have been determined significant. Based on this review, HPO finds that a comparison of other properties associated with both David Bazelon and George McGovern is required before a determination can be reached.

The nomination provides a short biography of Bazelon, Chief Justice of the D.C. Court of Appeals, and his judicial accomplishments, establishing him as a significant person. In 1949, Harry Truman nominated Bazelon to the highly influential court where he became Chief Justice and served three decades. Bazelon is hailed for his opinions where he considered sociological factors such as how racism, inadequate housing, and poor educational opportunities may have influenced criminal behavior. Bazelon cemented his place in American judicial history when he decided in *Durham v. United States* (1954) that “an accused is not criminally responsible if his unlawful act was the product of mental disease or mental defect.” As noted in the application, the decision, referred to as the Durham Rule, changed the legal perception of mental illness.

The application does establish Bazelon as a significant person, and he and his wife built the house and lived there during a ten-year period when he served on the Court. However, there is no information associating his residency at 3020 University Terrace to his professional accomplishments; for example, there is no information on whether he used the house as an office, held meetings there, or hosted professional events at the house. His greatest contribution occurred in 1954, before he built the house. HPO does find it compelling that the Bazelons built the house and thus it likely stands above their other places of residence, but no comparison has been provided.

The nomination also provides a biography of Senator George McGovern, second owner of the house, establishing him as a significant person for his political career and during his residency there. The application does show important associations between the house and his senatorial office and bid for the presidency. He moved there to gear up for the presidential race, held campaign events and fundraisers there and, after losing the election resoundingly to Richard Nixon, placed the house on the market. Still, in order to qualify for listing in the National Register under Criterion B, the application will need to go one step further and conduct a comparative analysis with other properties associated with McGovern to determine that 3020 University Terrace best represents his productive career in politics.

Period of Significance

The application proposes a period of significance of 1957 to 1980, from the house’s date of construction to the end of the McGovern ownership. Based on the present information, HPO recommends a period of significance of 1957, the construction date, consistent with the property’s significance under NR Criterion C for architecture.

Integrity

The house has undergone some changes, but those do not detract from its character. It retains integrity of design, materials, craftsmanship, feeling and association.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board designate the Bazelon-McGovern House as a historic landmark under D.C. Designation Criteria D, E and F (NR Criterion C) and further recommends forwarding

the nomination to the National Register. Staff recommends that additional analysis be undertaken to enhance the case for National Register Criterion B for association with David Bazelon and George S. McGovern. Should the applicants choose to do so, HPO recommends waiting to forward the nomination to the Register until such documentation is completed, or preparing a future amendment.